

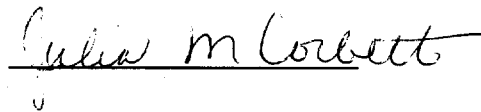
**Gandhi: Non-Violence Yesterday and Today**

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**by**

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Julia M. Corbett", is written over a horizontal line.

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**PURPOSE OF THESIS:**

This thesis is a glimpse at the man known as Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy. It includes three portions. One, an overview of Gandhi himself. Two, a discussion of his philosophy, both what it is and how it was derived. And third, a look at what has happened to his philosophy in more recent days. Included in the third section are excerpts from an interview with Arun Gandhi. The entire interview can be found in the appendix. Arun Gandhi is a grandson of Mohandas Gandhi and along with his wife has founded the M.K. Institute for Non-violence in Memphis , TN.

## **PART I:**

Mohandas K. Gandhi entered the world as an ordinary Indian child. There was nothing unusual about his birth or his family. Yet the name Gandhi is known virtually worldwide. The baby named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi became the man known as "Mahatma," or "Great Soul," Gandhi (Green, p. 348). He became famous for his philosophy of non-violence and his use of it to promote Indian independence. This philosophy of non-violence was based in part on his Hindu religious beliefs and convictions. It developed into a political movement first in South Africa and later in India and then was adopted by others including Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement in the United States. Gandhi's heritage and traditions were fundamental in shaping the philosophy of non-violence which is still being used in various ways today. There are even modern movements that could benefit from using the philosophy of this simple Indian man called Gandhi. In order to best look at Gandhi's philosophy, I will look briefly at the man behind it, then at the philosophy itself, and finally at where that philosophy has gone since the lifetime of the "Mahatma."

Mohandas K. Gandhi was born in Porbandar, India, on October 2, 1869. "He belonged to a respectable middle-class Bania family whose members had long ago abandoned their traditional caste occupation of trade and taken to administrative service" (Kripalani, p. 1). He had a traditional arranged marriage at the age of thirteen to a girl named Kasturbai. Because of his middle-class background, he was sent to school and it was only natural that at the age of

eighteen he left India for London to study law (Black, p. 14-17). Upon his return to India in 1891, he was unsuccessful as a lawyer. "His first small case was a dismal failure. He stood up to argue the case but he suffered from such a stage fright that he remained tongue-tied and handed over the brief to a brother lawyer and rushed home in shame, without even knowing the result of the case" (Kripalani, p. 9). After several equally unsuccessful attempts at teaching and drafting cases, Gandhi was presented with an option that would forever change his life.

A local Muslim firm offered to help Gandhi out with a year's contract with its office in South Africa. It was a minor clerical position, well below the salary and prestige his English education deserved. And it meant more separation from Kasturbai, who had just borne them a second son. But Gandhi jumped at the opportunity. It was, at least, a job, a chance to gain some experience and maybe turn his back forever on his bad luck (Black, p. 21).

However, difficulty followed. The South African office really needed someone who knew accounting. He was supposed to advise the legal counsel. In addition, because of the color of his skin he faced "daily contempt and even physical abuse" (Black, p. 21). Instead of giving up, Gandhi decided to press on. "He studied bookkeeping on his own and found with increasing self-confidence that his intellect proved equal to the need" (Black, p. 22).

Soon Gandhi found himself involved in the struggle for Indian rights in South

Africa. Unwillingly, he was thrust to the front of the movement whose "goal was to end discrimination and degradation and conformity by local governments to the spirit of the British constitution and the 1858 Proclamation" (Brown, p. 35).

Gandhi did not see himself as a great leader but rather, perceived himself "as an interpreter between the European and Indian communities" (Black, p. 51-52).

Although he intended to stay in South Africa for only a short while longer, it was three years until he left for India to raise support and retrieve his family before coming back (Brown, p. 34-35). When he returned to Durban, South Africa, he was beaten by a white mob. He refused to press charges against those who attacked him. He also "insisted to the press that he came back not to make money or to fulfill his own political ambitions, noting that he received no money for his public work and had not even tried to be enfranchised" (Brown, p. 35). Gandhi was very true to his self envisioned role as a mediator between racial groups.

There are several more significant events in South Africa with which Gandhi is associated. In 1899 he successfully headed the Indian Ambulance Corp. Military service was not an option so medical help seemed a feasible way to support the British as "loyal citizens of the Empire" (Kripalani, p. 16). After returning to India for a year to practice law in Bombay, Gandhi was once again requested to return to Durban (Hoyland, p. 4). In 1903, he began a weekly paper called the Indian Opinion. Its purpose was "to voice the feelings of the Indian community to remove the misunderstandings which had bred the prejudice of white settlers against the Indians, to point out to the Indians their faults and to

give them practical and moral guidance and a knowledge of their motherland, and to promote harmony in the Empire" (Brown, p. 53).

In January of 1908, Gandhi was jailed for the first time for not participating in the Asiatic Registration Act. A second jail term followed in October of that year and a third in February of 1909 (Hoyland, p. 4). He wrote an essay, *Hind Swaraj*, Indian Home Rule, in 1909 "as a trial discussion of his hopes for India" (Brown, p. 67).

In 1910, Gandhi established a settlement of Indians called the Tolstoy Farm. It was for families whose support had gone to jail. They lived there communally, sharing the workload, eating, sleeping, and learning together (Kripalani, p. 39-40). Gandhi finally left South Africa for the final time in 1914 after the Indian Relief Bill, giving some rights to Indians, was signed (Hoyland, p. 4).

Before going back to India, Gandhi spent some time in England. Once back in India, he remained outside of politics, mainly to observe the political situation. It was not until 1917 that he began a new personal political campaign when he took on the plight of Indian peasants in Champaran who were stuck in a system of sharecropping indigo. There were all sorts of economic and social restrictions against the Indian sharecroppers. For example, they could not ride a horse or hold an umbrella in the company of an English planter, nor were they allowed in the drawing rooms of the plantation houses. The Indian sharecroppers were also forced to pay for the planter's expenses when the planter purchased livestock or went on a trip. When a sharecropper died, their successor had to pay a "tax" to

officially take over ownership. They were very much placed on a lower societal level than the English planters. Eventually an agreement was signed that improved the conditions of the Indian peasants (Kripalani, p. 65-69).

Another activity Gandhi advocated was the *hartal*. This was a traditional period when work was stopped in order to pray and fast as a form of mourning. In 1919, he instituted a *hartal* day to oppose a British law (Brown, p. 130-131). Not only did he encourage mass participation in his program of non-violence, he also utilized individual effort. In 1926, Gandhi maintained a "silent" year in which he observed fifty-two silent Mondays (Hoyland, p. 4).

Gandhi also used fasting to bring attention to his cause. On September 21, 1924, Gandhi began a twenty-one day fast to encourage Hindu-Muslim unity. In 1932, he began what might have been a "fast unto death" which lasted from September 20-26, ending only when the British signed a pact that outlawed untouchability. Again in 1943 he observed a twenty-one day fast. 1947 brought a second "fast unto death" to encourage the end of fighting in Calcutta. Finally on January 13, 1948, he began his last fast to promote the awareness of the people of Delhi (Hoyland, p. 4).

March 12, 1930, saw the beginning of the famous "salt march" in which he and his followers broke the law by boiling seawater to retrieve the salt from it. This act was illegal because the British had imposed a tax on salt and Gandhi, along with his followers, did not pay the tax. This was the beginning of a civil disobedience campaign that also included a boycott of foreign cloth (Brown, p.

238-240). The campaign ended when the Irwin-Gandhi pact was signed on March 5, 1931 (Hoyland, p. 4).

These events are just brief highlights of some of the activities in which Gandhi participated. Some were more successful than others. Laws were changed, and more importantly, attitudes changed. Gandhi became a major leader of the Indian Independence movement. It was in the early events that Gandhi formed his philosophy of non-violence which he utilized in the following years. Even though not all of the followers of the campaigns held steadfastly to non-violence, Gandhi himself did. He also was quick to convey his disappointment when violence did occur.



## PART II:

Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence was developed throughout a lifetime. It drew deeply on his personal religious convictions. As a Hindu, Gandhi was familiar with other religions because of the inclusive nature of Hinduism (Chapple, p. 94). He believed, as do many modern day Hindus, that the same basic moral values exist in all religions and that all religions are just different means of reaching the same goal (Kripalani, p. 338-339). Hinduism for Gandhi "was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: the supreme reality of God, the unity of all life and the value of love (*ahimsa*) as a means of realizing God" (Nanda, p. 6). Besides drawing from religion, Gandhi was also influenced by writers like Tolstoy and Thoreau and by philosophers like Socrates (Brown, p. 55).

Hinduism and the Eastern concept of *ahimsa* or non-violence became the very basis of his belief. It has been said "that it is impossible to begin to understand Gandhi unless one realizes that his whole movement is based on religion. He lays continual emphasis upon the necessity for dedication of spirit to the service of God" (Hoyland, p. 73). Gandhi was born into the Hindu tradition but studied many other religions as well. "Though it (his theory) was deeply influenced by the Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Christian theories of non-violence, Gandhi's theory was in class by itself...He considered *ahimsa* one of the highest moral values and sincerely endeavored to live by it" (Parekh, p. 107).

The concept of *ahimsa* is a basic Eastern idea. It refers simply to "non-violence." Gandhi, however, took it a little farther. He

distinguished its two senses. In its 'narrow,' 'literal,' 'negative,' or 'passive' sense, it meant refraining from causing harm and destruction to others. In its 'broad,' 'positive,' and 'active' sense it meant promoting their well-being. In both senses, it was grounded in compassion or love; in one, love was expressed negatively, in the other, positively. Gandhi concluded that ahimsa was really the same as love: it was 'active love' (Parekh, p. 113).

Gandhi also believed that not only should you avoid harming anything, but you should develop "a positive desire to help others" (Parekh, p. 113). *Ahimsa* can also be defined as

harmlessness, the principle opposite to violence. One may suffer harm upon this earth, but one must not do harm! Rather one must be friendly to all life, animal as well as human, and conquer evil not with evil but with good, and hatred not with hatred but with love! This is the Eternal Law-indigenous to the East, inwrought in the culture of India, and 'the Truth' of Gandhi's life (Hoyland, p. 7).

In addition to the concept of *Ahimsa*, Gandhi also redefined *Moksha*.

Traditionally, the word refers to "the dissolution of individuality into *Brahman*.

However the dissolution consisted not in a mystical unity with it but in losing oneself in active service of mankind" (Parekh, p. 93-94). Most certainly, this is what Mohandas Gandhi did.

Gandhi's specific program of non-violence as a political movement was called *satyagraha*. It means literally "truth force" or "soul force" and as used by

Gandhi, "non-violent resistance" (Brown, p. xii). He began using the term in South Africa to refer to his service there. In most cases it is used to refer to a specific campaign. For example, on a societal level, it can refer to the movement to have all marriages made legal in South Africa, not just those marriages performed as Christian ceremonies. Many people, including women, went to jail for this (Kripalani, p. 45-46). It can also refer to an individual campaign against injustice as in the case of the Champaran movement, which Gandhi considered to be a personal *satyagraha* (Brown, p. 112).

### **PART III:**

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence has left a legacy for the world. People from all over the world have chosen to follow his teachings in their own struggles. Arun Gandhi, the grandson of the Mahatma, is now in the United States and, along with his wife, has formed the M.K. Gandhi Institute For Non-Violence. It is located in Memphis, Tennessee at Christian Brothers University. In an interview with Mr. Gandhi, he explained a little about the M.K. Gandhi Institute and its purpose. He and his wife started the Institute in 1991. Its purpose is to "promote the philosophy of non-violence and teach people how to resolve conflicts peacefully, to teach them how to deal with anger and just help people reduce the violence that we see in society." Mr. Gandhi also stated that they "do workshops and seminars, conferences, lectures and just about use every method possible to promote this philosophy, to reach the people" (Gandhi, p. iii).

One of the major ideas Mr. Gandhi stressed during the course of the interview was the idea that violence is not only the physical violence that we see; but that it also includes attitudes such as anger, hate, and prejudice. It is not enough that we do not perform violent actions, we must also avoid violent, hateful thoughts. In fact, many acts of violence seem to stem from peoples attitudes and feelings that they ultimately act upon.

In addition, Mr. Gandhi also believes that we must start with children and teach them non-violence from the beginning. One problem he sees in society now is that

we don't teach young people how to resolve conflicts peacefully, how to deal with their anger, show them how they should rightly express that anger repress that anger. What we don't show them is how to transform that anger into some form of positive energy and I think if we reach out to young people and children and teach these things to them, it would be possible to help them (Gandhi, p. iv).

When we can teach others, especially children, by our example, then we can begin to change the attitudes of society.

One particular movement that embodies the philosophy of non-violence is the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's in the United States. This movement began with small groups who violated laws that were discriminatory against them. These "violations" included sitting peacefully at lunch counters they had been told were off limits to them. Groups of people joined together and marched peacefully down streets or took bus tours through southern towns. In most, if not all, they were met by angry crowds who disagreed with what they stood for. They were beaten, harassed, arrested, and killed for standing up against injustice. While their actions were performed in a non-violent manner, they were met with anger and violence. This form of protest is commonly known as "civil disobedience."

One of the men at the forefront of this movement was Martin Luther King Jr., a man who advocated the philosophy of non-violence. "When King chose to pattern his crusades after Gandhi's campaigns, he inherited a doctrine of non-

violence that for thousands of years had been taught in different cultures as the eternal law of life" (Ansbro, p. 128). King did not agree with every method Gandhi used in his non-violent movement, in part because their purposes were different. Gandhi sought independence from a foreign system, while King sought transformation of the existing system (Ansbro, p. 134). King did agree with Gandhi that "legislation and court orders can seek to regulate behavior and control the external effects of the feelings of fear, hate, and prejudice." However, "they cannot change the heart and cannot alter the spiritual barriers.....Law cannot make us love one another" (Ansbro, p. 135).

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was one way King used non-violence as a tactic. The African-Americans who participated simply walked where they needed to go instead of taking the bus. Another way was the March on Washington and the marches from Selma to Birmingham. There was violence acted out upon them, but the marchers themselves were instructed to avoid violence. As an example, King related this story in a magazine interview:

When I saw with my own eyes over three thousand young Negro boys and girls, totally unarmed, leave Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church to march to a prayer meeting--ready to pit nothing but the power of their bodies and souls against Bull Connor's police dogs, clubs, and fire hoses. When they refused Connor's bellowed order to turn back, he whirled and shouted to his men to turn on the hoses. It was one of the most fantastic events of the Birmingham story that these Negroes, many of them on their

knees, stared, unafraid and unmoving at Conner's men with the hose nozzles in their hands. Then slowly the Negroes stood up and advanced, and Connor's men fell back as though hypnotized. As the Negroes marched on past to hold their prayer meeting, I saw there, I felt there, for the first time the power and the pride of non-violence (Inchausti, p. 83-84).

Non-violence can be a powerful emotional force when it is used on a level such as this. Martin Luther King Jr. used non-violence to begin a change in the United States. It did not happen overnight but it brought about broader recognition of the problem of racial discrimination in this country.

Martin Luther King Jr. followed in the path that Gandhi began. It was not exactly the same but King's view was very much influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. King's view of non-violence and civil-disobedience was based on Christian scriptures and theology. In the words of one King biographer, "He had realized that the passive peace of Southern racism was altogether a pagan social arrangement totally repugnant to the essential meaning of the New Testament" (Lewis p. 188). The justification for King's views on civil disobedience are based on the argument that "a man-made law that was just had to match God's law. A law that was unjust conflicted with this moral law" (Lewis p. 190). One of the major components of New Testament teachings is "love." To be more specific, The command to "love your neighbor as yourself" is found in all three of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Because racism and segregation are contrary to this command of God, they are unjust.

There are many movements in modern society, many of which take opposing viewpoints to one another. There are gun control groups, gay rights organizations and environmentalists. The list could go on and on. One of the groups that seems to be right at the center of attention is the anti-abortion activists. There have been people involved in this movement who have performed violent acts and many more who could be accused of having "violent" attitudes.

To begin, many anti-abortion activists believe that it is necessary to show graphic pictures of aborted fetuses to women who are trying to enter clinics. Employees of clinics that perform abortions are harassed and yelled at. There have even been several instances in which people have been killed, including an instance in which an abortion protester named Paul Hill murdered two people outside a clinic, one of whom was a doctor. Yet many of these groups claim to be demonstrating peacefully. Granted, everyone out there with a gun is not ready to shoot the next doctor they see, but when attitudes are so full of hate and "holier than thou" mentalities, something is bound to happen. People also do not realize that those on the extreme, like Mr. Hill, are the exception, not the rule. There are many people who believe that those who do not support the woman's right to choose are hateful and ignorant. This is far from true, but how can you blame someone for believing that when it's the only thing they have experienced.

All of these groups who are protesting various things seem to be fostering attitudes of hate and anger against others who think differently. Yet these are the same people who will turn around and complain that they are not being allowed to



express their opinions and ideas even though that is what they are doing to others.

Arun Gandhi stated that

the important thing to remember is that whatever method you use it has to be based on love and understanding. You've got to be able to change the person's beliefs or attitudes through love, not through pressure or anger so you know when we organize demonstrations for instance, these days people go out in demonstrations out in the street and they shout angry slogans and show their fists and you know that kind of thing and they feel that that is non-violent action because they are not using physical force but Gandhi's concept made it totally wrong. He believed that we are just as violent through our actions and through our words as we are through our physical violence. But this has to be understood and remembered when we are organizing such demonstrations (Gandhi, p. vi).

## **APPENDIX I:**

The following is a transcription of an interview with Mr. Arun Gandhi, the co-founder of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Non-violence at Christian Brothers University in Memphis, TN. The interview was conducted over the phone on Thursday afternoon, December 1, 1994. The interview was recorded and a transcription of it follows this summary. The transcription is written exactly as was said during the interview with the exception of words like "um" and "a" therefore it may not be "grammatically" correct.

After explaining what the center is and its purpose, Mr. Gandhi then discussed the idea of teaching young people that violence is not the best or only solution to problems. The next major topic of the interview was Gandhi and his philosophy, how it originated, what exactly it is and so forth. He then discussed the concept of two forms of violence, physical and passive. The next topic was fasting and the following one dealt with the idea that any method used should be done in love. The last question related racial prejudice as being a current issue that needs to be handled in a more non-violent way.

**Interview with Arun Gandhi on December 1, 1994**

**Mr. Gandhi is a co-founder, along with his wife Sunanda, of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Non-violence located at Christian Brothers University in Memphis, TN.**

(Q = Question, A = Answer)

**Q:** Can you tell me a little about the M.K. Gandhi Institute and what you do there?

**A:** The Institute was started in '91 and promotes the philosophy of non-violence and teach people how to resolve conflicts peacefully, to teach them how to deal with anger and just help people reduce the violence that we see in society. So we do workshops and seminars, conferences, lectures and just about use every method possible to promote this philosophy, to reach the people.

**Q:** One of the ways I found out about the Institute and that you had been on the Ball State campus was through an article in Campus Update which is for the faculty and staff of Ball State. In it there is a part that you say to curb violence in the world, society must look to children and I was wondering if you could talk about that and about any specific ways and about what you mean by that?

**A:** Curbing Violence? I didn't quite understand what you mean by that?

**Q:** You say that one of the solutions for stopping violence is to look at the children and to teach children. I was wondering if there was any like specific things that you had in mind dealing with the children like any specific ideas or ways to teach that?

**A:** Yeah, I think that, you know we don't teach young people how to resolve conflicts peacefully, how to deal with their anger, show them how they should rightly express that anger repress that anger. What we don't show them is how to transform that anger into some form of positive energy and I think if we reach out to young people and children and teach these things to them, it would be possible to help them,

I think there is a call coming in, could you hold on a minute?

So I think it would help everybody if we can reach young people and speak to them about non-violence and peaceful methods and all that

**Q:** One of the things we've been studying in my class is non-violence and I also saw in one of my books I've been reading on Gandhi is the idea of non-cooperation and is that something, the non-cooperation is that something

that you would also advocate or...?

**A:** One of the ways of dealing with injustice, but Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence was a much more constructive philosophy in which he dealt with lot of constructive ways in which a you know conflicts can be resolved. It's not always just a protest or a that kind of thing.

**Q:** So it would be safe to say that one of the ways to stop violence is to is to start with individuals and within families and work out, work from the inside out (right) rather than to try to pass laws and to legislate change?

**A:** You can pass laws up to a point and but you can't compel people to always obey those laws so it's essential that we find other ways of resolving issues and conflicts.

**Q:** Also, I know I had asked you on Tuesday if there was a or if you could think of any instances that you remember of your grandfather doing these things, speaking about why he did what he did and his beliefs and things like that?

**A:** Yeah, there are many instances I recall that in my opinion would have, but I think he basically got involved in non-violence and conflict resolution after his experiences in South Africa when he suffered a lot of humiliation

because of the color prejudice and all that and he realized he didn't have the means to seek justice violently and there were no armaments and no training and in any case he didn't believe in all that violence, in killing people and all that so he sought some other ways of resolving this and that's when the whole concept of non-violence came to his mind and he started thinking about it and applying it to his daily life and so I think that was sort of the birth of the philosophy that then it just built up and he went deeper and deeper into it and he made it a part of his life then of course he believed that it was like you said not just demonstrations or a protest movement that he dealt with he also realized that people themselves have to get involved in finding solutions to many problems that we face and those solutions come about only with understanding and a commitment and a so he got the people trained, began to train people in this philosophy, the way of life. Taught them how to go out and to see conflicts and try to resolve them. We should be able to anticipate conflict situations before they become serious conflict situations and find solutions to those problems. That would be the right thing to do and this is what he trained people to do. He trained them to go out and see these things. He also trained people to understand that violence occurs in various forms, passive violence and physical violence. Physical violence is what we see, the actual killings and beatings and murders and rapes and so on. Physical manifestations of violence but there is a lot of passive violence that we practice also in the form of hate, anger

and prejudices, exploitation and all of that and if we really want to deal with all these violent situations and create a peaceful atmosphere then we have to look at all of these other aspects of violence too.

**Q:** One of the other things we have been talking about very recently in class is Jainism and the idea of fasting and ultimately fasting unto death and I know that Gandhi in various instances did fast. Was that the same thing as the Jains' concept of fast unto death or did he use that as a different...

**A:** No he believed that fasting was one of the ways in which we can use non-violence and he also believed that it has to be used very carefully, with a lot of understanding and not abused so he occasionally used that method but it was just one of the methods in the arsenal of non-violence if you can put it in that wording.

**Q:** I think those were all of the major questions that I had. Let's see, besides specifically the fasting and the non-cooperation, are there any other like specific methods that can be used to protest or to stop violence?

**A:** Well there are many methods people have been using, fasting, protesting, and you know non-cooperation, but all of these the important thing to remember is that whatever method you use it has to be based on love and

understanding. You've got to be able to change the person's beliefs or attitudes through love, not through pressure or anger so you know when we organize demonstrations for instance, these days people go out in demonstrations out in the street and they shout angry slogans and show their fists and you know that kind of thing and they feel that that is non-violent action because they are not using physical force but Gandhi's concept made it totally wrong. He believed that we are just as violent through our actions and through our words as we are through our physical violence. But this has to be understood and remembered when we are organizing such demonstrations.

**Q:** Are there any issues in like current event issues that you think would be handled better in a by using Gandhi's method, by using non-violence and those kinds of tactics instead of the way they are being handled right now?

**A:** Well yeah, many, many issues that need to be handled properly and the main one is the racial prejudices that exist that need to be tackled non-violent, and peacefully I think if we do that we might be able to bring about a better solution to the problem.

**Q:** Well, I think that's all the questions I have for right now but thank you very much for allowing me to do this.



**A:** All right, if you need any more you can always call back.

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